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In addition to the several other species which we have used with Rosa Sinensis in creating our modern hybrids, there are 3 or 4 other forms which have contributed a great deal. While they are undoubtedly true Rosa Sinensis botanically, they vary enough from a horticulturist's standpoint to merit special attention.

One of these is the narrow petal white which we grow here as "White Wings". This is said to be from Fiji, but I have no authoritative evidence. It is quite close to the Hawaiian native species, but also crosses with Rosa Sinensis. It's hybrids are almost always recognizable. A pink form called "Fiji" is popular in Florida. In California, I use "White Wings" primarily as rootstock, since it has a strong root system. (Ed. Note - White Wings, in Florida is suseptible to root rot and other fungus diseases.)

While unquestionably true Rosa Sinensis, the group of varieties called "Versicolor" are certainly individualists in their color habits. There are 3 of them - red, pink and orange, with the pink and red quite common. The orange appeared in collections over 50 years ago and in Hawaii is often mis-called Cameroni. These are characterized by separated narrow petals, the back of which are partially white.

Another interesting form is a small lavender, with a deep wine colored center zone which, on first study, appears to be identical to the single Althea. It is produced on a tree-like plant and will serve as both a seed and pollen plant. It may be the source of the lavender shades we now have in some of our hybrids. Also, quite possibly, it was used in the crosses which resulted in the varieties said to be Sinensis-Syriacus crosses.

There is also a small mahogany colored single,

which while popularly supposed to be a man-made variety of Rosa Sinensis, is quite different in many respects. Also, many of you have seen the white and green variegated hibiscus called Matensis and some of you may know of another variegated leaf type called Cooperii or Copper Leaf. Their origin is obscure, but in Dombrain's Floral Magazine of 1872, both were mentioned as having been introduced from the South Seas. They are grown primarily as novelties, although a large form of Cooperii is popular in the gardens of Jamaica.

Perhaps some mention of the blue Australian species, H. Hueglii, should be made here. Several careful workers in Florida have tried to cross this species with Rosa Sinensis without success. I will not say that such a cross cannot be made, but I am doubtful because Australian plantsmen have also given up on it. However, I shall give it a real try under controlled conditions.

In summarizing the history of hibiscus, I have pointed out that Rosa Sinensis is a native of India and South China, that it had wide distribution in the South Seas before the Pacific was known to European peoples, that it was first grown in America and England in the 17th Century and that in Hawaii, where the plant has reached its highest point of development, Rosa Sinensis has been grown for over 100 years. Now, I shall try to trace the efforts of plantsmen in all of these areas to improve the flower through hybridization.

Hibiscus is not easy to seed, even in its native haunts, but English nurserymen, with the help of their greenhouse temperatures, accomplished the first man-made recorded crosses over 100 years ago. The first reported was described in the Floral Cabinet, in 1844, a cross, by the way, between H. Rosa Sinensis and H. Cameronii. From that time on, English gardeners did quite a bit of pollenization, but from published descriptions of their hybrids, it is apparent that they made little, if any, improvement in the